

General Trip info

Map

Trip Code: IQVSJ

Trip Length: 13

Trip starts in: Playa del Carmen

Trip ends in: Antigua

Meals: 1 Breakfasts included
1 Dinners included

Accommodation: Hotel (11 nights), Homestay (1 night)

Transport: Private minibus, local bus

Daily Itinerary

Day 1

Playa del Carmen

Your adventure begins with a Welcome Meeting at 6pm on Day 1. Please look for a note in the hotel lobby or ask the hotel reception where it will take place. If you can't arrange a flight that will arrive in time, you may wish to arrive a day early so you're able to attend. We'll be happy to book additional accommodation for you (subject to availability). If you're going to be late, please inform the hotel reception. We'll be collecting your insurance details and next of kin information at this meeting, so please ensure you have all these details to provide to your leader. On arrival in Mexico it is possible you will feel lethargic and lose some appetite. This is nothing to be concerned about and is just your body acclimatising to the heat and humidity. Be sure to drink plenty of water and try not to do too much in any one day, you'll soon adjust.

Day 2

Chichen Itza/Merida

Today we will hop on a local bus at about 8am, heading towards the ruins of Chichen Itza (approx. 3 hours). This bus is rather fun because you cruise through little villages seeing the Mexican life outside the city of Cancun. For snacks you can try the vendors that come into the buses selling sweets, sandwiches, tacos and all that good stuff. We have about 2-3 hours to spend at Chichen Itza before we travel onwards. One of the most impressive Mayan sites, Chichen Itza contains both Toltec and Mayan ruins lying alongside each other. The famous El Castillo pyramid dominates the ruins and the site also has the largest ball court where games used to be held. The games are depicted in carvings on the walls. Nearby, excavations of the Well of Sacrifice offered up treasures of jade, copper and gold as well as many human and animal bones. After a tour with a local guide we travel on to Merida (approx. 2 hours) where we will spend the night. Your tour leader will take you to the centre of town and show you some of the main sites of this beautiful city.

Day 3

Merida

Founded in 1542, Merida still retains much of its old-world charm with a well-preserved Old Town, wonderful museums and city streets alive with art and culture. Hang out in the green and shady Plaza Grande, with the twin-towered 16th century Cathedral on one side and City Hall, State Government Palace and Casa Mantejo on the others. For a taste of Merida's 19th century glory go for a walk along the mansion lined Paseo de Montejo. Mornings are the best time to visit the outdoor markets and you can stock up on hammocks and Maya replicas. It's a great place to try out the local food specialities, like cochinita pibil or the head-blowingly spicy El Yucateco hot sauce. Merida is also the gateway to the Maya ruins of Uxmal and there is an opportunity to visit these impressive ruins. Little is known about the site's origins but it is thought the city was founded around AD500. Much of the site is decorated with masks of the rain god Chac. This is no great surprise as the area has a lack of natural water supplies and the city relied on rain water.

Day 4

Palenque

Today we have an early start and we jump on one of the very comfortable first or second class buses in Mexico. These buses are equipped with TVs and bathrooms, just what you need for a long bus ride to Palenque. You will leave the Yucatan and travel into the state of Chiapas in southern Mexico (approx. 10 hours). Along the way the bus will stop a few times to give us time to stretch our legs and buy some food and drinks. Once we arrive in Palenque it is a short walk to the hotel.

Day 5

Palenque

Today we will hit the ruins with a local guide in Palenque to give you all the information that you need on these mystical ruins. Palenque is situated on a hilltop in an area of hot jungle and is home to possibly the most impressive series of Mayan ruins, which date back at AD600. Whilst walking amongst the ruins it is often possible to hear the eerie calls of howler monkeys echoing from the jungle, giving an added dimension to this magnificent site. The temples are superb relics of Mayan culture and there are many ruins here still un-excavated and hidden in the surrounding forest.

Day 6

San Cristobal de las Casas

After breakfast we take another bus to the city of San Cristobal de las Casas (approx. 5 hours). The local Zapatista movement in the region around Palenque has been quite active in recent months, occasionally holding protests or blocking roads. Our local operations team is constantly monitoring this situation to ensure the safety of our passengers and leaders. In some cases we might need to use an alternative route from Palenque to San Cristobal to avoid this activity - more so to bypass long traffic delays than any real danger.

Day 7 - 8

San Cristobal de las Casas

With winding cobblestone streets and colonial Spanish architecture, San Cristobal de las Casas maintains a lovely old-world feel mixed with strong indigenous roots. The surrounding villages are populated with Tzotzil and Tzeltal Indians who maintain their tribal origins through their varied traditional costumes and customs. There is time here to explore the villages, perhaps by mountain bike. If you take a day trip to San Juan Chamula, make sure to visit the church. The floor is covered with pine needles and the air is heavy with incense. Shamans come here to carry out cleansings with firewater, ancient prayer and sometimes chickens. There are also markets with colourful handicrafts for sale. Take the opportunity to go for an optional day trip to Sumidero Canyon. Back in town, go for a stroll and try to spot the cafe with the most locals in it for a taste of the traditional 'elote', a corn cob which makes a common snack in the highlands of Chiapas.

Day 9

Totonicapan homestay

From San Cristobal we head down to Guatemala by van. It takes about 4 hours to get to the Guatemalan border and another 5 hours to get to our final destination, Totonicapan. The border crossing is fairly easy, just make sure you have your passport ready and the tour leader will give you detailed instructions on what to do once at the border. Once in Totonicapan we will be introduced to our host family and the group may be split in twos or threes depending on the group size. Locals in Totonicapan are both very friendly and very shy. In order to make the most of this experience, it may take a bit of effort from your side to break the ice first. Learn as many Spanish words as you can and get ready for some serious sign language action. Houses are very basic. Your room may only consist of a couple of beds with clean bedding; the bathroom will most likely be outside your room and be shared with the rest of the family. The mother of the family will cook dinner and breakfast for you. Meals can be very basic but filling, consisting of corn, rice and beans. You may want to stock up on some snacks beforehand.

Day 10

Panajachel

Today we continue driving south to Panajachel (approximately 2 hours). Panajachel is located on beautiful Lake Atitlan and it has a thriving market, good eateries and many water-based activities to enjoy. Go for a swim, hike or kayak on the lake. The surrounding area is dotted with villages which can be reached on foot or by boat. Watch women weaving at Santa Catarina Palopo or explore the colourful markets of Santiago Atitlan. In each village the local life has changed little over the last few hundred years. Each village has its own typical dress and make all the textiles themselves in designs passed down through generations.

Day 11

Panajachel

Today is a free day in Pana for you to continue exploring this fascinating region of Guatemala.

Day 12

Antigua

Today we head towards Antigua (approx. 4 hrs) - our final stop in the Guatemalan Highlands. The old colonial capital of Guatemala, Antigua remains the cultural centre of the country. Its cobbled streets, local markets, colonial buildings, and indigenous marimba music emanating from the many bars and restaurants create a fantastic atmosphere. If you're into salsa dancing or you'd like to learn some moves, Antigua is the place to be. Many dancing schools offer hourly lessons that give you the preparation to hit the discos at night and show your moves.

Day 13

Antigua

There are no activities planned for the final day. If you have time, on the last day perhaps consider taking an optional day trip to Chichicastenango to see the famous market. The town of Chichicastenango lies about 2,200 metres above sea level and features the best of handicrafts from all over Guatemala. This market is a big magnet for national and international travellers. Make sure you also go to visit the local fruit and vegetable market. Unfortunately, more than half the population of this beautiful Guatemala you have come to know so well lives under the poverty line, which may explain why Guatemala has also the lowest literacy rate in Central America. With this in mind, the Intrepid Foundation is proud supporter of CasaSito, an outstanding not for profit organization dedicated to assist youth to reach their academic, personal and professional potential. If you have 2' to spare (2'41" to be exact!) take a look at this short video about CasaSito – it's inspiring: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=3KBiGdEcV4w> If you want to help CasaSito and Guatemala's youth, you can donate through the Intrepid Foundation, which means that your donation will be match dollar for dollar by Intrepid too. No donation is too small. \$5, \$10, \$50 it all goes a long way to help this fantastic organization. Simply visit our website: www.theintrepidfoundation.org/projects/casasito/

Additional Information

Included Activities

Chichen Itza Ruins - Entrance Fee
Palenque - Archaeological site (Entrance fee & Transport)
Totonicapan homestay

Optional Activities

Maya villages - San Juan Chamula and Zinacantan, including textile making with community
Sumidero Canyon - Boat Excursion (Entrance & Transport)
San Cristobal de las Casas - Mountain bike tour
San Cristobal de las Casas - Amber (Jade) Museum
San Cristobal de las Casas - Jade Museum
San Cristobal de las Casas - Museum of Typical Costumes
Panajachel - San Pedro Volcano hike
Panajachel - Guided lake and villages tour
Panajachel - Mountain bike tour
Panajachel - Bicycle rental (per day)
Panajachel - Zipline
Panajachel - Kayak rental (per hour)
Panajachel - Water taxi to Santiago, San Pedro or San Juan
Antigua - Chocolate-making workshop
Antigua - Bike tour
Antigua - Santiago Zamora village tour
Antigua - Coffee/Macadamia nut plantation tour
Antigua - Salsa lesson (per hour)

Notes for Guatemala

With breathtaking mountains, volcanoes and the amazing crater Lake Atitlan dominating the landscape, Guatemala is the perfect place to get out and explore some stunning natural scenery. The country is bursting with vibrant culture, from the music and art of the beautiful colonial town of Antigua to the evocative local markets of Chichicastenango. Guatemala is also home to the truly incredible Mayan ruins of Tikal, some of the finest ancient ruins in the world.

Citizens of the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada and all EU countries will not need a visa to visit Guatemala as a tourist for up to 90 days. Citizens of other countries should check with the relevant consulates as to whether a visa is required. If a visa is required, you will need to obtain it in advance. A valid yellow fever vaccination certificate is required from travellers coming from areas with risk of yellow fever transmission (including transiting through an airport in an area of risk).

Notes for Mexico

Home to the Aztec and Mayan empires, Mexico is a country full of culture and history. The architecture left behind is nothing short of magical – with Imaginative Traveller you can explore the iconic sites of Chichen Itza, Palenque, Teotihuacan and many more. Mexico also offers an incredible variety of food, music, art and culture, and is home to some wonderful natural scenery from the deserts of the north to the canyons and forests of the centre, to the beaches and cenotes of the south.

Citizens of the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada and all EU countries will not need a visa to visit Mexico as a tourist for up to 180 days. Citizens of other countries should check with the relevant consulates as to whether a visa is required. If a visa is required, you will need to obtain it in advance. Citizens of Russia, Ukraine and Turkey will need to apply for an Electronic Authorisation before travel.

Important Notes

The routes, activities and places visited as described in these trip notes are intentions and are meant as a rough guide only.

These trip notes have been compiled to help you prepare for your journey once you have booked. They include the full itinerary and dates, and information about kit lists, meeting hotels, insurance, vaccinations, visas, and other information that will help you get ready for your trip.

These notes are updated regularly, so please ensure you have an up-to-date version of these trip notes.

The planned route and itinerary is the intention, but exact night stops and inclusions cannot be guaranteed. It occasionally happens that there must be a change to our planned itinerary - this may be for a variety of reasons, such as climatic, road or bureaucratic conditions. By their very nature, adventure travel needs to be approached flexibly and some regions can be unpredictable. Some Imaginative Traveller journeys go through off the beaten track areas, which often have poor infrastructure and less stringent safety standards than we are used to at home.

Our Groups

Our groups are made up of people from around the world and are usually an interesting mix of nationalities and ages. On average there is a pretty even split, males to females and between solo travellers, couples and small groups of friends. We believe that adventure travel should be open to as many people as possible and so although some trips have a minimum age limit, as long as you are fit, healthy and passionate about travel, we are happy to take you. One of the highlights of group travel is the camaraderie and friendships that are formed along the way, and as well as the variety of people that you will meet.

The maximum group size depends on the operator and the style of transport, but will usually be a maximum of 15-16 or up to 21-22 on our overland journeys.

Accommodation

Imaginative Traveller trips are designed for shared accommodation, whether staying in hotels, hostels, homestays or campsites, and therefore do not involve a single supplement. Single travellers will share with people of the same sex for the duration of the trip and those that book together will usually be able to share accommodation.

The type, variety and standard of accommodation will vary greatly depending on what options are available in the region you are travelling; hotels can vary from very basic rooms without electricity or running water to high standard hotels with good facilities! Generally in hotels most rooms will be twin-share. Hostels, gers and yurts are nearly always multi-share.

Many trips will feature a stay in a local homestay or community tourism initiative, allowing us to experience a slice of local life in the areas we travel through. On our overland trips, we will sometimes camp in campsites ranging from rather basic or even wild camps to those with excellent facilities, including swimming pools, restaurants and bars.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any dietary requirements please tell us at the time of booking and also remind your leader at your welcome meeting. Our crew will try to cater for any particular dietary requirement or food intolerance whenever possible.

Health

You need to be in good physical health in order to participate fully in our trips. When selecting your trip

please make sure you have read through the itinerary carefully and assessed your ability to cope with the style of travel on that trip. We are always happy to give extra advice if you have additional concerns. Please note that if, in the opinion of our leader, you are unable to complete the itinerary without undue risk to yourself and/or the rest of the group, Imaginative Traveller or our partner operators reserve the right to exclude you from all or part of the trip.

You should consult your doctor for up-to-date medical travel information prior to travel, particularly if you have a pre-existing medical condition. We also advise you to declare any pre-existing medical conditions to your travel insurers upon purchase.

Altitude

Imaginative Traveller offers some trips that travel to above 2,800m altitude above sea level - it is imperative at high altitudes to drink lots of water to stay hydrated, be careful not to get burned by the sun, and try not to exert yourself too much. Some pre-existing medical conditions are known to severely worsen at high altitude and be difficult to adequately treat on the ground, leading to more serious consequences. It is imperative that you discuss your pre-existing medical condition/s with your doctor. We understand certain medications are reported to aid acclimatising to high altitude; please discuss these options with your doctor.

Yellow Fever

A valid international certificate of vaccination against Yellow Fever is required in many countries. You may need to present this on arrival at the airport or border crossing. Some countries will refuse entry if you are unable to present your certificate - please see each country's note above for details. It's also quite common for your home country to request a Yellow Fever certificate on your arrival back home.

It is your responsibility to check with your doctor well in advance of leaving home about the Yellow Fever requirements for the countries you'll be visiting.

Malaria and other mosquito-borne diseases

Some areas we travel to have the risk of contracting malaria. If this applies to your trip, please get expert advice before travelling about types of malaria pills and take them as instructed. Recommended types do change from time to time and from area to area. Consult your GP / travel clinic for the most up-to-date requirements and to find the right option for you. If advised by your doctor to take a course of anti-malarial tablets, please complete the course as instructed as malaria can often manifest itself upon your return home if the course is not followed.

Other mosquito-borne diseases such as Dengue Fever, Chikungunya and Zika are continuing to spread and becoming a bigger problem around the world. Bite prevention is vital to avoid contracting any of these diseases as there are no vaccines or specific treatments available. Health professionals have issued warnings for pregnant women travelling to areas affected by the Zika virus.

The mosquito usually bites between the hours of dusk and dawn and so covering up by wearing long-legged and long-sleeved clothing, preferably light coloured and buttoned at the wrists, can help. Do not sleep without closing windows, use a mosquito net where possible and use mosquito repellent applied directly to your skin or soaked into your clothing.

Vaccinations

Recommended vaccinations and other health protection vary according to different regions and recent bulletins issued by health authorities. It is essential to get the latest advice on the region(s) you are planning to travel in so please check with either your doctor or travel clinic in good time before you travel.

We also recommend you check out any specific health advice for the country you are travelling to either via your GP or the following websites: www.nathnac.org or www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk

In the UK, we have been working with Nomad Travel for many years and their website has comprehensive,

up-to-date vaccination and health information. You will receive a 10% discount off all vaccinations given at Nomad Travel clinics.

Activities

Included activities are listed in the day-to-day itinerary, all other activities are optional and at your own expense. If you choose not to participate in the included activities on this itinerary, the cost will not necessarily be refunded; this is something you will need to check with your leader.

A selection of optional activities is listed in the day-to-day itinerary. This list is designed to be a helpful guide as to what is commonly available in each location, and is neither an exhaustive list, a guarantee that the activity is available, or an endorsement or recommendation. Please note that certain activities may not be available on your particular visit if they are overbooked, underbooked, out of season, or for any other reason - the list of activities is made according to our latest information and in the best faith, but please be aware that things may change between our last visit and your arrival. Please also note that it may not be possible to do all the activities listed in the time available at each destination, and it is recommended to give yourself extra time in your joining or ending city if you would like to participate in some optional activities there.

If you do any optional activities, you do so at your own risk and it must be clearly understood that your participation is your own decision and does not form part of your contract with Dragoman. You may be required to sign/complete a waiver form or optional activity form for some optional activities.

Insurance

It is a condition of booking that you have comprehensive travel insurance. Without evidence of valid travel insurance you will not be allowed to start the trip. This can be arranged by Imaginative Traveller through our website or by contacting our team of travel consultants.

If you prefer to arrange your insurance independently, it should have a minimum medical (including repatriation) cover of £2,000,000. We recommend that any policy also has a minimum level of cover for Personal Liability of £2,000,000 and for Cancellation and Curtailment of £5,000. Cover for loss of baggage, personal effects, money and other inclusions are down to personal choice although please bear in mind that personal effects are more likely to go missing whilst travelling and you should ensure that your policy is adequate to cover the value of your personal effects e.g. cameras, tablets, phones etc. Please note that Imaginative Traveller and our partner operators are not responsible for your personal effects and are not insured for their loss.

If you prefer to arrange your insurance independently, it should cover you for any activities that you may wish to participate in, such as white-water rafting, trekking, horse-riding, etc. and the 24-hour Emergency Assistance Company must be experienced in handling situations in developing countries if applicable (e.g. they have the ability to arrange repatriation from remote areas such as the Sahara or trekking in the Andes). If you are travelling to high altitude (such as embarking on a trek to the summit of Kilimanjaro), please make sure that this is also covered.

Please double check if you have annual travel and/or credit card policies to ensure they have the cover you require, as many of these policies are not suitable with adventure travel to remote areas. Many credit card medical insurance policies are not valid for travelling outside your country of residence or outside the EU.

Please also check the age limits on any policy you wish to take out and make sure that you thoroughly inform the insurance company of any pre-existing conditions.

Passports

Check that your passport will still be valid for 6 months after the end of the trip - this is important as some countries WILL refuse entry to anyone whose passport is due to expire. A temporary or emergency passport is not valid on our trips. You will need to provide us with your passport details prior to departing for your trip. If you change your passport please remember to inform us.

Pre and Post Trip Accommodation and Transfers

At Imaginative Traveller we believe you should make the most of the places you visit, so if you would like to see more of the joining or finishing point cities, why not book additional accommodation to extend your stay? We can take away the hassle of time zones and language barriers by making the booking for you. This accommodation is only available at the joining or finishing city of your trip, immediately before or after the trip you are travelling on. Please note our rates do not reflect last minute walk-in rates or internet specials.

We can also book arrival airport transfers for you as long as we have your flight arrival details. These are normally payable in cash upon arrival; however we do have pre paid transfers in a few destinations.

Please contact our reservations team for details of the accommodation and transfers that we can offer, as not all hotels offer this service.

Responsible Tourism

Imaginative Traveller is committed to ensuring that we have a positive impact on local communities and that we implement policies to minimise any negative impact on the local environment. We recognise that we are guests of local communities and strive to make them benefit directly from our visit. You can find full details of Imaginative Traveller's responsible tourism policy on our website.

Issues on the trip

While we always endeavour to provide the best possible holiday experience, due to the nature of travel and the areas we visit sometimes things can and do go wrong. Should any issue occur while you are on your trip, it is imperative that you discuss this with your group leader or our local partner straight away so that they can do their best to rectify the problem and save any potential negative impact on the rest of your trip.

We recognise that there may be times when your group leader may not be able to resolve a situation to your satisfaction. If this is the case please contact our customer relations department on

customer-relations@imtrav.net

You may also choose to provide details in your feedback questionnaire which we ask you to complete at the end of your trip, but we do ask you to be aware that it is very difficult for us to provide any practical help after the trip is complete.

Feedback

After your travels, we want to hear from you! We rely on your feedback. We read it carefully. Feedback helps us to understand what we are doing well and what we could be doing better, and it allows us to make improvements for future travellers.